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⌘ CHAPTER 1 ⌘

Some Preliminary Remarks

ANYONE who asks at the end of the twentieth century what free will is, whether we have it, and how we know that we have it, owes an explanation to those who may wonder why they should read yet another volume devoted to these antique and supposedly antiquated questions. In reply to those who so wonder I should say that my treatment of the subject is distinguished by advocating a combination of ideas that may make this study of interest even to hardened specialists on free will and to those who have studied the long history of philosophical thinking about it. I summarize these ideas in this introductory chapter while fully aware that some of them have been advocated by other philosophers and that no writer on free will can ever be sure that any of his or her ideas on this much-examined subject are absolutely original. I summarize them here even though doing so will make my later elaboration of them more repetitive than I would like it to be. But I do so because I assume that the reader would prefer to know now what he or she is getting into with me, even at the expense of being less surprised later on.

1. A Moral Principle Links "Ought" and "Can"

Suppose that a moral adviser of Cicero tells Cicero that he ought to kill Caesar because Caesar is a tyrant and all tyrants ought to be killed by those who have an opportunity

to do so. Does the adviser's statement that Cicero ought to kill Caesar logically imply the statement that Cicero is free to kill Caesar? My answer is that it does not imply it in the sense in which some philosophers might say that the statement that Cicero is a man logically implies that Cicero is an animal. Instead, I believe that the inference from "Cicero ought to kill Caesar" to "Cicero is free to kill Caesar" rests on a moral principle which says that every action that one is morally obligated to perform is an action that one is free to perform. If the adviser assumes this moral principle and the statement that Cicero is morally obligated to kill Caesar, the adviser may of course validly deduce from these two premises that Cicero is free to kill Caesar. But the adviser cannot immediately, on logical grounds alone, deduce the statement that Cicero is free to kill Caesar from the statement that he ought to kill him. Nor can the adviser correctly claim that the conjunction of the statement "Cicero ought to kill Caesar" and "Cicero is not free to kill Caesar" is unintelligible, as some have argued. In rejecting the idea that this conjunction is self-contradictory or unintelligible, I prepare the way for my own affirmative view of the connection between "Ought" and "Can", or between "Ought" and "Free".

In addition to presenting this moral view of the relation between "Ought" and "Free", I deal with the vexed problem of the relation between free will and determinism. I begin by examining the view that "Cicero is free to kill Caesar" logically implies "Cicero can choose to kill Caesar", and that the latter statement logically implies that Cicero's not choosing to kill Caesar is not causally necessitated by anything. After criticizing this attempt at showing that "Cicero is free to kill Caesar" logically implies the falsity of the principle of universal causation or determinism, I then

examine a more recent argument for the incompatibility of free will and determinism.

2. An Aside on the Analytic and the Synthetic

Since I have said that "Cicero ought to kill Caesar" does not logically imply "Cicero is free to kill Caesar" in the sense in which some philosophers say that "Cicero is a man" logically implies "Cicero is an animal", I may appear to be departing from views that I have defended elsewhere.[1] For it may be thought that by speaking in this way I give my support to the idea that the statement "If Cicero is a man, then Cicero is an animal" is analytic in a sense that I have criticized in other writings whereas "If Cicero ought to kill Caesar, then Cicero is free to kill Caesar" is synthetic. It may also be thought that in stating a view of what "Cicero is free to kill Caesar" *means*—which I will try to do later—I once again fall into a way of speaking that reveals conscious or unconscious acceptance of views of analyticity that I have sometimes attacked rather vehemently. For this reason, I want, at the earliest possible moment, to head off the idea that I am backtracking on this important philosophical issue.

I continue to believe that the effort to demarcate sharply between the analytic and the synthetic by resting on alleged knowledge of the relationship between Platonic concepts or meanings is misguided, but I do not think that I am therefore forbidden to use philosophical terminology that is sometimes associated with the doctrine that such a

[1] See my *Toward Reunion in Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), esp. chapters 7, 8, and 9.

demarcation is defensible. In other words, I think that I may say without fear of backtracking that "Cicero ought to kill Caesar" does not logically imply "Cicero is free to kill Caesar" without being committed to the view that a logical implication is true by virtue of the meanings or attributes expressed by the terms in the relevant sentences whereas a nonlogical implication is not. I may say all of this because, in calling an implication "logical" as opposed to "nonlogical" as I did earlier in this chapter, I record my view that it is one that I am very reluctant to surrender as opposed to one that I am not so reluctant to surrender. In other words, I say that the supposedly analytic statement "If Cicero is a man, then Cicero is an animal" is one that I am exceedingly reluctant to surrender whereas the supposedly synthetic statements "If Cicero is a man, then Cicero is a biped" and "If Cicero ought to kill Caesar, then Cicero is free to kill Caesar" are statements that I am less reluctant to surrender in the face of what might appear to be adverse experience.

This gradualistic view is closely connected with the holistic or corporatist theory of knowledge that I espouse, a theory which says that we test our beliefs against experience in conjunctions. So, if the two statements (1) "If Cicero is a man, then Cicero is an animal" and (2) "If Cicero ought to kill Caesar, then Cicero is free to kill Caesar" were both in a conjunction that led logically to a faulty prediction, and if the resulting defect in our conjunctive theory could be repaired by surrendering (1) or (2), then statement (2) would be surrendered and removed from our theory more readily than statement (1) would be. And this epistemological situation would not change in my opinion if one were to call (1) a logically true conditional statement and (2) a morally true conditional statement. I

want to assure some of my readers that I continue to think that the distinction between so-called analytic and synthetic statements is best viewed as a matter of degree even though, in an effort to communicate with those who think otherwise, I use their terminology. Although the literature on free will contains terms that reflect the acceptance of views that I reject, I think I can state the issues and offer my own views on free will without lapsing into what I regard as errors regarding analyticity and allied notions. And where I seem to lapse into such errors, I hope that charitable readers will do me the favor of reading my terminology in a manner that will render what I say compatible with what I have said in this section.

3. What Having Free Will Is

It is sometimes said that "Cicero is free to kill Caesar" is synonymous with the statement "If Cicero chooses to kill Caesar, he will kill him",[2] but this view is not accepted by philosophers who rightly say that this conditional statement must be supplemented at least by the statement "Cicero can choose to kill Caesar" if we are to express what "Cicero is free to kill Caesar" means. Some philosophers who insist on such an addition go on to say that "Cicero can choose to kill Caesar" must be interpreted as meaning the same as "Cicero's not choosing to kill Caesar is not causally necessitated by anything". However, in my view, the added possibility-statement that Cicero can choose to kill Caesar need not be interpreted in this antideterministic way. In criticizing this argument for antideterminism,

[2] See G. E. Moore, *Ethics* (repr. London: Oxford University Press, 1949), chapter 6.

I point out that the added possibility-statement should rather be understood to say that Cicero's not choosing to kill Caesar is not causally necessitated by *certain specified things* or by things of *a certain kind*. But this approach need not faze another kind of antideterminist, who says that determinism is to be rejected because it logically implies that whether Cicero chooses to kill Caesar or not, his choosing or his not choosing will be causally necessitated by things that happened before Cicero's birth and over which he has no control. This antideterminist presents an argument against determinism that I shall also consider later on.

Before proceeding any further it will be helpful if I say what I mean by the doctrine that we have free will. I mean simply that human beings are often free to perform actions; and when we say that a particular human being named "Hea" has this freedom, we mean to assert—for reasons that I shall later discuss—the following conjunction: (1) If Hea chooses to perform the action, Hea will perform it; and (2) Hea can choose to perform it; and (3) if Hea chooses not to perform the action, Hea will not perform it; and (4) Hea can choose not to perform it.[3] Here the conjunction of (1) and (2) says that the agent can perform the action; the conjunction of (3) and (4) says that the agent can avoid performing the action; and the conjunction of (1), (2), (3), and (4) says that the agent is free to perform the

[3] Locke says "Liberty 'tis plain consists in a Power to do, or not to do; to do, or forbear doing as we *will*," *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 270. And Hume says: "By liberty, then, we can only mean *a power of acting or not acting, according to the determinations of the will*; that is, if we choose to remain at rest, we may; if we choose to move, we also may," Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, in *Hume's Enquiries*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1902), p. 95. To such statements I add two statements about possibility of *choice*.

action. If we wish to say merely that the agent is free to choose to perform the action, we need only assert the conjunction of (2) and (4). So if we should say that we have free *choice* (by contrast to free will) we mean that human beings often make free choices.

4. How We Know We Have Free Will

As I have already indicated, another of the main ideas employed in this study is an epistemological doctrine that I have elsewhere called "corporatism", a doctrine outlining the method whereby we justify the belief that we have free will as I understand it. This doctrine is closely connected with the holistic view of Pierre Duhem and W. V. Quine that scientists do not usually test isolated beliefs or statements but, rather, bodies or conjunctions of statements or beliefs.[4] However, my corporatism differs from the view of some other holists insofar as I hold that moral beliefs may be included in a tested body of beliefs that also includes nonmoral beliefs. Let us suppose that a philosopher agrees with me that we cannot immediately deduce "Cicero is free to kill Caesar" from "Cicero ought to kill Caesar". If, however, he begins his thinking about free will with premises—some moral and others not—that lead him to make

[4] See Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", *Philosophical Review* 60 (1951), reprinted in Quine, *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), pp. 20–46; also Quine, "Five Milestones of Empiricism", in his *Theories and Things* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 71. For Duhem's views, see his *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1954), esp. pp. 187–90. My own view is presented in *What Is and What Ought To Be Done* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), esp. chapter 2, but I wish to take this occasion to say that I think my present view of free will is superior to the view I merely outline in that work.

a moral statement like "Cicero ought to kill Caesar", he may infer from this moral statement and the moral principle that all obligatory acts are free the statement "Cicero is free to kill Caesar". This same philosopher, however, may now part company with me and say, as I have remarked earlier, that he can deduce from "Cicero is free to kill Caesar" that Cicero's not choosing to kill Caesar is not causally necessitated by anything. While reasoning in this way such a philosopher accepts a partly descriptive, partly moral body or conjunction of beliefs that should, I contend, meet certain corporatist standards of testing. And I hope to show by applying such standards that this philosopher's conjunction of beliefs should be abandoned in favor of a conjunction that replaces the statement that Cicero can choose to kill Caesar by a denial of a statement that certain specific items causally necessitate Cicero's not choosing to kill Caesar—for example, by a denial of the statement that Cicero's not choosing to kill Caesar is causally necessitated by Cicero's experiencing an attack of a choice-preventing mental disease. I think that such a conjunction is preferable to others for reasons similar to those that make one scientific theory preferable to another.

I hope to show how the ideas I have sketched not only clarify but, I dare say, contribute to the solution of some of the most pressing problems concerning free will. I doubt that what I say will satisfy all readers, but I hope to formulate the main problems concerning free will in a way that will clarify alternative solutions that are open to all of us and call attention to considerations that should be weighed by anyone who proposes a solution. There is, however, no solution to these problems that all persons accept, and the main conclusions to which I come on these matters rest on views about which a consensus may be especially hard to reach. Many widely held views about

what the connection is between a moral statement and a statement of freedom, and about how we should understand free action and free choice are views that are neither obvious truths nor deducible from obvious truths. If, however, we adopt a moral version of the principle that "Ought" implies "Free", according to which it may be interpreted differently by different persons, and a related view of the variable meaning of a sentence such as "Cicero can choose to kill Caesar", we may better understand why philosophers find it so hard to agree about the subject of this study.

Like Hume, I think that the question of free will is "the most contentious question of metaphysics, the most contentious science"; but unlike Hume, I do not think that "by liberty . . . we can only mean *a power of acting or not acting, according to the determinations of the* will",[5] since I believe that some determinations of the will or choices must themselves be possible in some sense if we are to have liberty or freedom of action. My method of specifying this sense of "possible choice" leads me to say with William James: "I . . . disclaim openly . . . all pretension to prove . . . that the freedom of the will is true"; and I also agree with James "that its truth ought not to be forced willy-nilly down our indifferent throats".[6] Finally, I should emphasize that although many philosophers have held as I do that all obligatory actions are free, few philosophers maintain as I do that this is a moral principle which need not be accepted by everyone, and that sentences such as "Cicero can choose to kill Caesar" may be expanded and analyzed in ways that may vary with the person who is

[5] Hume, *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, p. 95.

[6] William James, "The Dilemma of Determinism", *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 115.

doing the expanding and analyzing. The relativism or pluralism that underlies my saying this will, I hope, become clearer later on when I defend my view of the principle that all obligatory actions are free and when I explain the two-step process of expanding and analyzing a sentence such as “Cicero can choose to kill Caesar”.